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## **Pentagon Takes Close Look At Combining Commands**

By John Diedrich, The Gazette

The Pentagon appears poised to merge the Colorado Springs-based U.S. Space Command with U.S. Strategic Command in Nebraska and put the headquarters in Omaha, according to those close to the deliberations.

At stake are 800 military jobs and the area's standing as the military's space capital.

But nothing is certain. Pentagon officials continue to study the merger. Ultimately, the recommendation will go to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and then President Bush.

A merger is being considered, in part, to limit military bureaucracy. The Pentagon will establish its new homeland defense organization, Northern Command, in October, most likely in the Springs. Rumsfeld has pledged creating the new command won't lead to more positions and expensive base improvements.

Rumsfeld doesn't want to expand the number of unified commands, the military operations that draw from all four service branches to fight wars for the United States. There are nine commands now.

This merger is the one that makes sense to Pentagon planners. Space Command oversees all military satellites, including nuclear missile warning systems. Strategic Command is responsible for the nation's nuclear weapons.

It's not the first time the merger has been considered.

In 1993, a study concluded the merger wouldn't save much money. It said Canadians, the United States' partner in NORAD, would object to being in the same organization that commands offensive nuclear weapons.

NORAD has been under the same commander as U.S. Space Command since the mid-1980s.

But much has changed since the last study. NORAD will be paired with Northern Command, making the Canadian concern moot.

Space Command and Strategic Command overlap, according to a memo from the Pentagon. The merged command would handle cyber-warfare and other information operations, nuclear defense and attack, and space support and warfare.

Those factors, not money, are the reason a merger is being studied, the memo said.

"The world has changed a lot in nine years, and this merger makes more sense now," a Pentagon official said.

During visits to the Springs, Pentagon officials appeared to favor merging the commands, said Larry Fortner, a retired two-star general who works on military matters for the Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce.

"My feeling is that the merger of Strategic Command and Space Command is probably pretty definite," he said.

"It looks like the flag (commander) will be in Omaha."

It would make some sense to put the headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. The base has room to add Space Command workers because the 2,000-person, \$100 million Strategic Command has shrunk in recent years.

The 800-person Space Command, with a \$67 million budget, has grown. Two buildings are going up at Peterson Air Force Base, but part of that space will be gobbled up by Northern Command.

If one of the commands has to move, it would be more expensive to move Strategic Command because of the classified nuclear targeting information in place at Offutt.

If the merger goes through, Fortner expects about half of Space Command's jobs to be moved to Nebraska, but he said that decision has yet to be made.

Space Command is asking its workers if they will be willing to make the move. But a spokesman said that doesn't mean the move is definite. The commander just wants his people prepared if it does.

If part or all of the command moves, the impact would be softened by the Pentagon's plan to bring Northern Command to the Springs — and with it, 500 to 1,000 jobs.

The bigger concern locally is whether the Army and Air Force space commands, which together have a more than \$8 billion annual budget, would follow U.S. Space Command to Nebraska.

Fortner doesn't see that happening.

"I think we are too well-established in Colorado Springs as the center of space operations."

Rumsfeld signaled if Space Command leaves, it won't mean a lot of people, buildings or missions are moving with it.

"The important assets that are here would clearly stay here regardless of where the commander of Space Command might be sitting," he said before the Air Force Academy graduation May 29.

Local leaders haven't been heavily lobbying the Pentagon to keep Space Command in the Springs, but they have pointed out the command works well the way it is.

"Our argument would be, what is the compelling reason to move it? If it ain't broke, don't fix it," said Jeff Crank, the chamber's senior vice president for government affairs.

"We want (the Pentagon) to do what makes sense for the country and its defense. We think it makes sense for Space Command to stay in Colorado Springs."

Rep. Joel Hefley, R-Colo., opposed the merger in 1993 and has been in discussions with Pentagon officials in this round.

Some members of Congress have grumbled Colorado Springs is getting more than its fair share of military operations and call it "Pentagon West."

Hefley said all he wants is an honest study of a merger.

If it makes sense, he'll support it.